

'Camp Greyhound' outpost of law and order

By Kevin Johnson, USA TODAY

NEW ORLEANS — Claude Moman wanted out of this flood-ravaged city so much Thursday, police say, that he stole a rental car and made a dash for the downtown Greyhound bus station, hoping to buy a ticket out of here.



Inmates wait to go back to their cells inside a temporary jail facility at the Greyhound bus station in New Orleans.

By Omar Torres, AFP/Getty Images

What Moman didn't know was that hours earlier, Louisiana prison authorities had commandeered the station and transformed it into a makeshift jail.

Moman, 30, thus became the first arrestee to be held at what the state Department of Corrections has dubbed "Camp Greyhound." The new jail, which features chain-link holding cells topped by razor wire in what used to be the station's parking areas, became necessary when the city's justice complex was flooded. Its opening was among the first signals that authorities were gaining their footing against the looting and violence that plagued New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina hit.

Since the terminal was taken over by law enforcement authorities, it has become the new face of justice in this devastated city. More than 220 people have been detained there before being moved elsewhere to await trial. Most of those passing through Camp Greyhound have been accused of looting, but there also have been a few accused killers and rapists, said Burl Cain, a state prison warden who oversees the jail.

In the chaotic days after Katrina hit Aug. 29, looters and other suspected criminals often were issued citations and

set free by police because there was no place to put them. Many of those caught and released by police simply returned to looting, Cain said.

"You have to have a jail before you can have security," Cain said.

State and federal prosecutors work in the lobby of the bus station. Looking for the Orleans Parish District Attorney's Office? Head to the gift shop. The Justice Department has an office near the ticket counter. Cain has a table at what was formerly a Subway sandwich shop.

As suspects arrive, prosecutors decide whether they should face state or federal charges. Photographs and fingerprints are taken before the suspects are moved to the outdoor, covered holding cells, which are watched by armed guards. At least 50 prisoners were there Thursday, awaiting transfer to U.S. or state custody for hearings. Federal prisoners are sent to Baton Rouge and Lafayette; state prisoners go to a facility in St. Gabriel.

About 700 arrestees can be held at the station. Its cells, which hold about 15 prisoners each, have no cots, mattresses or chairs. The floor is the asphalt parking lot. There is one portable toilet per cell. Meals are military-issue MREs (meals ready to eat).